

Lent is for Lovers

(Article found at CatholicExchange.com¹)

By: Br. Jordan Zajac, O.P.



If you don't give it up for love, you won't give it up for long.

Growing up in New England—the birthplace of Dunkin Donuts—Dunkin coffee was like mother's milk to me. Instead of milk, though, I took mine with cream and (because of my diabetes) Sweet n' Low. It is said that the philosopher Immanuel Kant's daily walks were so absolutely routine that his neighbors could set their watches by them. My morning runs to Dunkin in graduate school were nearly the same.

One Lent, I decided to switch to black coffee. Quite the sign of heroic virtue, right? I recognized it would only be a small sacrifice, but at least it would be something that I felt the impact of every day, you know? The resolution was made.

¹ Editor's note: This article originally appeared on *Dominicana*, the Dominican student blog of the Province of St. Joseph, and is reprinted here with kind permission. *Lent is for Lovers* is a program of the Dominican Friars at St. Gertrude Parish in Madeira, Ohio, find their videos on their site or on YouTube.

By that first Sunday of Lent, I was in misery. It turns out that I loathe unadulterated Dunkin coffee. My mornings were no longer creamy and dulcifying. Instead, they were thin and watery, or sometimes burnt and biting. I would groan with every scalding hot sip. *Yuck*.

As days turned into weeks, I struggled to maintain the motivation to keep up this penitential practice. When you're sitting there in line at the drive-thru and you have the ability to choose *just this one little sense pleasure*, you know, *just this one time*, what inspires you to turn it down, day after day? Only something higher. No one sacrifices one good unless it's motivated by a higher one.

With time, I started thinking of the crucifixion. "I thirst," Jesus says from the cross (Jn. 19:28). In return, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus puts it marvelously,

He is given vinegar to drink mingled with gall. Who? He who turned water into wine, the destroyer of the bitter taste who is sweetness and altogether desire.

In lieu of sweetened coffee, meditating on Christ became my sweetness. And, over the course of the long Lenten weeks, I did gradually grow accustomed to the daily black burnt water—er, coffee. I mean coffee. The sacrifice became easier to make because I was enjoying thoughts of something, or Someone, much higher.

Man cannot live without joy. If he is deprived of true spiritual joys, St. Thomas Aquinas observes, he will pursue and cling to worldly pleasures (*ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, ad 2). Lent is all about recognizing the grip we have on carnal pleasures—or rather, that they have on us—and letting that grip loosen. Giving up lower delights makes space to seek, and enjoy, higher ones.

That Holy Week, I was in Chicago for an academic conference. Walking back to my hotel from Mass on Easter Sunday, I turned the corner and, glancing up, caught sight of three familiar colors: Princeton Orange, Vivid Cerise, and UPS Brown.

"Welcome to Dunkin Donuts. Can I help you?"

Taking my first sip, what went through my mind wasn't *oh, that's good*. Instead, I vividly remember thinking: *Jesus Christ is truly risen*. As cheesy as it sounds, I probably looked at that medium-sized styrofoam cup as if it were the empty tomb itself. Enjoying my old favorite—with an enjoyment made totally new—became a real and vivid way of experiencing the Resurrection.

Lent shows us that it is possible to forsake the pleasures of the world for the love of God; Easter reveals that our love of sensible goods can be enhanced by our love for God. Through Lenten sacrifices, such loves can get a boost—elevated and oriented toward the pursuit of our ultimate good.

Give it up for love, and you'll get it back, better than ever, both now and for ages unending. Indeed, Lent is for lovers.

Sadie Hawkins and Lent

(Article found on catholicexchange.com²)

By: Mark Shea



When I was in high school, every February saw the annual ritual of "Sadie Hawkins Day." Sadie Hawkins was a character in the old cartoon strip "L'il Abner" who took things into her own hands when it came to datin', courtin' and all the rest of the male/female frou-frou that so occupies the adolescent mind. She didn't wait for a guy to ask her out. She asked him.

So, once a year, in honor of dear Sadie, my alma mater held a dance in which the girls asked the guys out for a change. The net result of this arrangement was to create a social situation in which a small but stable group of insecure boys were reminded for four years straight that no girl in the school

² Read more: <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/mark-shea/sadie-hawkins-and-lent/#ixzz3StpBjIxJ>

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would touch them with a barge pole. Your on-the-scene correspondent is here to tell you that this is but one of the reasons Graduation Day 1976 was a tremendous relief to me. It was also a reason that February, for many years, triggered in me a deep and abiding gloom. To a non-Christian like me, it was the least worthwhile month in the calendar. Christmas was dead and gone while dark winter still hung around. After President's Day, there wasn't going to be another holiday till Spring Break. Homework was only going to increase. And here was the Marquis de Sadie, putting up posters all over the school to remind you that, on top of everything else, pretty much everybody in the world--except for you--was lovable and fascinating to *somebody*.

In high school, I profoundly believed in my unique social leperousness, in my transcendent repulsiveness to the opposite sex and in my utter failure to be part of the In Crowd. On my worst days, I congratulated myself that this uniqueness was due to my vast intellectual superiority over the masses who Just Couldn't Understand Me. On my next worst days, I swung to the opposite pole and accounted for my sense of unique isolation by accusing myself of being a peculiarly revolting specimen whom my fellow human beings could not be expected to tolerate for long.

What never occurred to me in high school was that I was not unique at all, and that the great mass of my fellow human beings felt as isolated, klutzy, stupid, and unlovable as I did. I was so fretful about getting "in" that it never occurred to me that a) most people were as "out" as I was and b) "in" was not all that worth getting.

It was our Lord, in his Catholic Church, who began to heal this terrible sense of being outcast. For our Lord is, if anything, the Center of all things. He is as "in" as you can get, the heart of all life, the center of all being, the very fountainhead of existence. And yet, right here, I found a paradox. For the Son of Man is cast out by men. More than that, he deliberately turns his back on all the social climbing, cliques and posturing that so occupied my high school mind (and continues to occupy the more sophisticated high school lunchrooms known as Hollywood, Washington, D.C. and New York). When the Sinmeister offered him chance to be People Magazine's Most Fascinating Person of 30 AD ("All this will I give you," said Satan, "if you will bow down and worship me.") our Lord chose the obscurity and ostracism I so feared. When offered all the kingdoms of the world, he opted for the desert. Why?

Because he knew that at the center of this dog-eat-dog world there is no There there. He came, not to get in, but to get *us*. Where I was so sweaty about making something of myself in order to finally be lovable, he had long ago made nothing of himself--because he loved us. He came to heal the leper.



Closing Prayer

Loving Father,
So many times I turn away from you
and always you welcome me back.
Your mercy and love gives me confidence
Thank you for the invitation to share, fast and pray
so that you can form a new heart within me.
Your powerful compassion for my weaknesses
leads me to ask for mercy
and await with great hope the Easter joy you share with us.
Amen.